

10 Parks, Recreation & Open Space

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Quality of Life, Tourism and Economic Development

Gunnison's location in a beautiful mountain environment with ample vistas of open space and distant peaks contributes to a high quality of life for residents and visitors. This natural setting is enhanced by numerous recreational opportunities, including organized programs that take place at city parks and other facilities, and less structured activities, such as strolling along a trail or relaxing on a park bench.

Although the importance of agriculture as a component of Gunnison County's economy has declined, farms and ranches provide open space and help to define our community character and heritage. Efforts are underway to preserve agricultural land and other open space (see Past and recent Studies below).

Opportunities for recreation and other leisure pursuits within the city and Gunnison County attract a large number of visitors who make significant contributions to the local economy. In Gunnison County, employment in the services and professional sector, a major indicator of tourism that includes retail trade, increased from 43 percent of total employment in 1970 to 62 percent in 2000.¹

Major recreational and tourism activities and facilities² that contribute to the economies of the City of Gunnison and Gunnison County are as follows:

- Alpine skiing – Crested Butte Resort has accounted for approximately 350,000 skier visitor days per season during recent years. Mount Alamosa, owned by the city, provides alpine skiing only – miles north of Gunnison.
- Nordic skiing – The Crested Butte Nordic Center operates an extensive network of 35-40 kilometers of groomed trails. In a typical year, there are approximately 300 season pass holders and 1000 annual visitors purchasing daily passes. Hartman's Rocks also features groomed trails as snow conditions permit.



¹ Gunnison County Comprehensive Plan, Appendix B, which includes other socio-economic data.

² See Gunnison County Comprehensive Plan for a more detailed description of recreational activities and facilities.

- Hunting – During the 2003 season, the Colorado Division of Wildlife sold many hunting licenses for management units in the Gunnison County area: 3,006 for elk, 586 for deer, 103 for bear and 409 for other species. The U.S. Forest Service issued permits for 313 service days to outfitters and guides.
- Fishing – The pristine water quality of the county’s rivers, including the Gunnison River and Tomichi Creek, attract fishermen casting for rainbow trout, brown trout, brook trout and Kokanee salmon. Blue Mesa Reservoir is considered one of the best lake fishing resources in the state.
- Hiking – There are more than 1,000 miles of public access trails within Gunnison County, located mostly on U.S. Forest Service and BLM land. Based on voluntary sign-ins at trailheads and wilderness areas, which represent only a small fraction of hikers, federal agencies estimate that approximately 10,000 hikers use the trail system annually. Near Gunnison, the extension of the Colorado Trail connects with Western State College and a new trail is planned for land purchased by BLM along Tomichi Creek east of Gunnison.
- Biking – Crested Butte has become a magnet for mountain bikers and has established a “Fat Tire Week” to promote the sport. Hartman Rocks south of Gunnison also has multi-use trails that are popular with mountain bikers.
- Rafting and Kayaking – The economic impact in 2002 from rafting on the Gunnison and Taylor Rivers was \$3.1 million.³ In 2002, there were 14,587 user days on the Taylor River and 2,350 user days on the Gunnison River. The Whitewater Park on the Gunnison River, developed in 2002, attracts many kayakers.
- Boating – The Curecanti Recreation Area, primarily Blue Mesa Reservoir, attracts nearly one million visitors per year. According to a Visitor Satisfaction Survey conducted in 1999, fishing and pleasure cruising are the most important activities.

Past and Recent Studies

This section provides an overview of two documents that are relevant to the Parks, Recreation and Open Space element of this Master Plan. The Parks, Recreation and Open Space Master Plan, December 1996, contains many items that pertain to today’s planning efforts. The Gunnison County Comprehensive Plan, 2005 includes a chapter on agriculture and open space that provides a regional context for this master plan.

³ Colorado River Outfitter’s Association, 2003.

Parks, Recreation and Open Space Master Plan

The 1996 plan provides an inventory of parks and school facilities existing at the time of the study, an inventory of potential joint city/county parklands and open spaces within and near the city and a list of priority recommendations. An updated inventory is presented in the following section. The priority recommendations are summarized below:

1. Recreation Center – Identified as the highest priority, the indoor recreation center described in the plan should include aquatic facilities, fitness areas, community areas and a separate room for teens. Ten years later, the recreation center has been completed; a description of the facility and services/programs offered is presented in the section below
2. Shaded Skating Area and Expanded Warming Hut – In 1996, all skating and hockey activity occurred at PacMan Pond and two outdoor skating rinks at Jorgensen Park.
3. Trails – The third highest priority identified in the plan was the identification and implementation of a pedestrian/bicycle/roller blade circulation system that connects various parks and activity centers, including the Gunnison River Greenway, Western State College, Hartman Rocks and downtown. The plan also recommends development of:
 - a. An outer loop trail that circles the city and connects to public trailheads on the outskirts of the city
 - b. An auto-pedestrian loop, providing improved streetscape conditions for auto and pedestrian connections
 - c. A neighborhood trail system connecting streets and neighborhoods together
 - d. A trail system that follows the historical walking tour , as designated by the Gunnison Historical Society.
4. Regional Park – The Van Tuyl property was identified as the site of a regional park. Possible recreational uses discussed in the plan included: paved and unpaved trails; a series of controlled wetlands for active and passive water recreation; playing fields; an environmental education center; an agricultural lease of the property resulting in significant education, economic and recreational opportunities for the city.
5. Community and Neighborhood Parks – The plan states that the city is well served by the community park complex of Jorgensen and Legion Parks. Although CharMar Park serves the northwest corner

of the city as a neighborhood park, the plan recommends that at least one more neighborhood park is needed within the city.

6. Special Attractions – The plan lists four additional items in specific locations:
- a. The southwest quadrant of the city needs park space. The 100 year floodplain of the Gunnison River is identified as a potential location for trails and open space.
 - b. A lane separated from Gold Basin Road for pedestrian and bicycle travel to Hartman Rocks is needed.
 - c. A schematic master plan for the County Fairgrounds was prepared as part of the 1996 Parks, Recreation and Open Space Master Plan.
 - d. The plan recommends that existing city and county properties be incorporated into a long-term park facilities development and management plan. Identified properties include the sewage treatment plant, the river/kayak whitewater park, Mergelman Lake and the city tree dump and archaeological site.
 - e. The entrance to the city from the airport could be improved with street plantings, a planted median, signage and sidewalks.



Gunnison Whitewater Park

Gunnison County Comprehensive Plan

Gunnison County adopted its Comprehensive Plan in 2005. Two elements pertain to parks, recreation and open space: Section I – Agriculture and Open Space and Section IV – Recreation and Tourism. Section I describes the relationship between agriculture and open space, particularly the undeniable linkage between agricultural preservation and view shed protection along the US 50 and SR 135 highway corridors. The plan concludes that the viability of agriculture is crucial to retaining the rural lifestyle and visual appeal of the county, particularly within these major highway corridors.

Section I also describes open space preservation efforts within the county. The plan describes three principal organizations that have led efforts to preserve open space in the county: Crested Butte Land Trust, the Gunnison Ranchland Conservation Legacy and the Gunnison Valley Land Preservation Board. Some conservation easements are also held by the nature Conservancy and the Trust for Public Lands. Total easements held in the county amount to approximately 33,000 acres, nearly ten percent of all private land in the county. Some of these easements are located north and east of the city, just outside the three mile plan area.

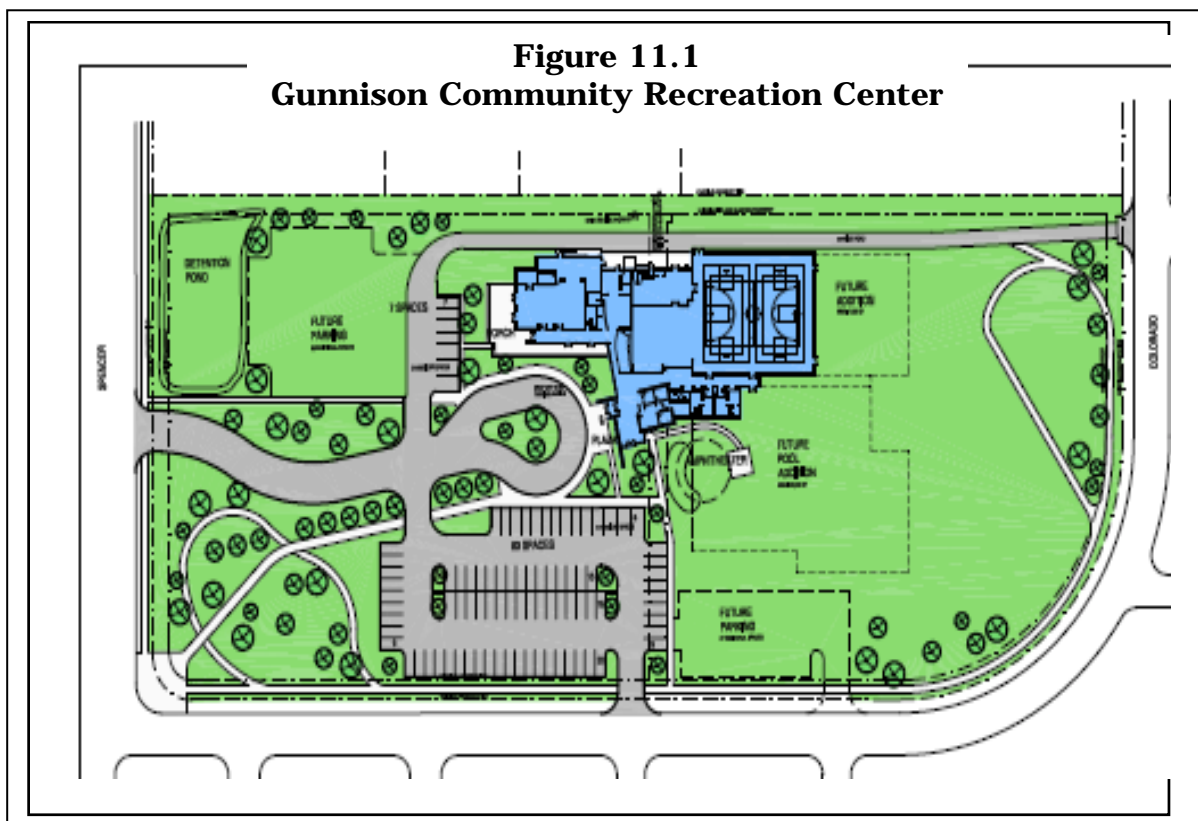
Section IV addresses the relationship between recreation and tourism.

Table 11.1
Gunnison Parks & Recreation Facilities

Much of the data from this section is summarized in Quality of Life, Tourism and Economic Development, above.

Inventory of Existing Parks, Recreation Facilities & Programs

For a city of its size (approximately 5,400 people), Gunnison has ample and diverse parks and recreation opportunities. In addition to public lands surrounding the city, Gunnison has a variety of parks within its corporate limits as well as regional facilities such as Hartman Rocks and Cranor Ski Area nearby. In addition to parks, the city opened the Gunnison Community Center in 2005, which provides year-round indoor recreational opportunities. The center, shown in Figure 11.1, features a climbing wall, basketball courts, volleyball courts, a gymnastics room, and a game room. The city has agreements with Western State College and the school district for use of their facilities for city recreation programs. The city provides an extensive recreation program that serves all age groups. A detailed description of programs is presented on the city's website at <http://www.myrecdept.com/co/gunnison/default2.asp>. Table 11.1 summarizes the data on all existing parks.



Park Name	Acres	Existing Facilities
Neighborhood Parks		
I.O.O.F. Park	0.25	This small downtown park located in the heart of the Gunnison business section is used by passer byes to sit and relax on benches and picnic tables.
Bill's Park (AKA Endner Park)	0.5	Shuffle board, horse shoes, 6 garden plots for the residents of Mountain View Apartments., and a 20' x 20' covered pavilion with a couple of picnic tables. The park is fully lighted and handicapped accessible.
Charmar Park	1.0	Three lighted tennis courts and practice wall, a half court basketball court, playground unit, two swing sets and a small neighborhood play field. Restrooms are in the construction phase. Parking is provided for pedestrian access to the Gunnison River.
West Tomichi Riverway	2.6	Provides access to Gunnison River
Meadows Park	4.5	Two basketball courts, playground unit, restroom, picnic shelter, and an open multi-purpose playing field.
Community Parks		
Jorgensen Park	15	Three lighted softball fields that convert to flag football fields in the fall, playground equipment, one old timer's baseball field, one full size baseball field, BMX track, three sand volleyball courts, skate park, a stocked fishing pond, two restroom facilities, a gazebo to house your wedding, a soccer field, a youth football field, three picnic shelters, concession stand, and a covered in-line rink. During the winter months, the softball, soccer, baseball, and football fields turn into lighted, groomed cross-country ski tracks. The volleyball courts, fishing ponds, and in-line rink turn into resurfaced ice-skating surfaces. A warming house is available equipped with two locker-rooms and concessions.
Legion Park	15	Three lighted basketball courts, playground units for all ages, six horseshoe pits, restrooms, and picnic tables.
Regional Parks		
Cranor Ski Hill	55.5	A Poma lift provides access to the top of the 305 vertical foot hill.
Hartman Rocks Recreation Area	160	The 160 acre base area with trails, a parking lot and restroom is jointly owned by the City of Gunnison and Gunnison County and serves as a trailhead for the adjacent 8,000 acres of federal land managed by the BLM. This area receives heavy visitation by a variety of recreationists including hikers, mountain bikers, vehicle recreationists, shooters, horseback riders, skiers, rock climbers, and many more.
City	160	Two parks make-up this 160 acres wildlife observatory.

Mountain Park		The south park contains 11 camp-sites, each camp-site with a fire pit, and an outhouse. The north park is for day use and features a large pavilion equipped with picnic tables and a ¾ mile nature trail. Both parks provide river access.
Gunnison Whitewater Park	NA	Located on the Gunnison River, this facility is built for recreational canoeing, kayaking and rafting. The community park associated with the water park includes a walking path, picnic area with grills. The trail runs the whole length of the park and provides fishing access. The management and maintenance of the park is overseen by the Todd Crane Center for Outdoor Leadership and the Recreation Department at Western State College.

Desired Future Conditions, Policies and Action Items

Desired Future Conditions

Community parks and recreation facilities, including Hartman Rocks, hockey rinks, baseball fields, the whitewater park, and the community recreation center provide world class, year-round affordable and accessible recreational opportunities for residents and visitors of all ages. Resources associated with ranches or other open spaces and dedicated public lands are conserved where possible.

Policies and Action Items

Policy

1 Adapting City Parks

Where appropriate, the City of Gunnison will maintain, improve, replace or establish new city park lands and facilities and plan park resources in order to meet the future needs of the community such as demographic changes in ages, family sizes, and income levels. Action items to implement this policy include:

1. Explore and evaluate funding mechanisms to expand developed recreation facilities, such as a community aquatic center and hockey facility with refrigerated ice.
2. Develop and implement a trails plan as described in the current master plan for parks, recreation, and open space, and include a trails plan for the Van Tuyl Ranch. The trails plan shall address items such as trailhead design, access issues, parking facilities, picnic areas, bathroom facilities, connections to other areas in the city and county (River Walk, etc.) and highlight cultural significance for heritage tourism (the Van Tuyl working ranch, for

example). Ensure that the trails plan is commensurate with both the transportation and land use chapters of this Master Plan.

3. Work with other governmental agencies such as the USFS and BLM to ascertain trail development strategies that will discourage “social trails” to preserve the integrity of the area.
4. Take steps to assure new subdivisions and other developments are accessible to recreational opportunities: for example, evaluate an impact fee system.

Policy

2

Alternative Energy Sources

When expanding recreation facilities, the City will strongly consider using alternative energy sources, such as geothermal heat pump systems, solar designs, and other techniques.

Policy

3

Adapting Recreation Programs

Where appropriate, the City of Gunnison will maintain, improve, replace or establish new City recreation programs to meet the changing demographics (age, family size, income levels) of the citizens. Action items to implement this policy include:

1. Coordinate the City’s efforts, where possible, with other organizations such as RE1J, WSC, Chamber of Commerce, Gunnison Arts Center, Gunnison Metropolitan Recreation District, Gunnison Area Community Foundation, Crested Butte Mountain Resource, USFS, BLM, US Park Service, the DOW, the County of Gunnison and other entities to provide a wide variety of recreation programs.
2. Work with Western State College to develop and implement recreation programs, such as a summer camps (e.g., gymnastics camp), where the City implements the programs, and the College allows use of dormitories and other college services.
3. Engage the public by creating advisory boards or steering committees where appropriate for specific projects.

Policy

4

Supporting Conservation

The City of Gunnison will support (financially and with letters of support) the county and other entities in their efforts to conserve view sheds, open space and agricultural uses of city interest through conservation easements, land acquisitions and other implementation methods. Action items to implement this policy include:

1. Work with the ranching community to identify open space and agricultural areas that should be preserved.
2. Explore use of incentive techniques such as transfers or purchases of development rights, when mutually beneficial.

Policy

5

Community Gardens

The City of Gunnison supports efforts for community gardens on public land, including vegetable and botanical gardens, and supports implementation of educational programs for community gardens.

Policy

6

Animal Habitats

The City of Gunnison encourages and supports fisheries/wildlife/water fowl habitat plans in recreational open spaces